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ABSTRACT

This bulletin focuses on the requirement of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 that school-to-work initiatives engage representatives of organized labor in the development, implementation, and governance of a school-to-work system. The first section outlines what organized labor brings to the school-to-work initiative. The next section presents strategies through which organized labor can be actively engaged in the development of school-to-work systems: local partnerships; identifying growing occupations; enhancing the quality of work-based learning; linking academic to occupational learning; developing skill standards and credentialing techniques; developing assessment mechanisms; mentorship; and occupational health and safety standards. Two examples of effective practices are described: the Job Skills Partnership Program operated at six sites by the Southern California Edison Company to provide students with the opportunity to work directly with frontline workers in the utility industry and the District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund, a union-management organization related to the health care industry that has developed health academies functioning as schools within schools. Contacts and addresses for these programs are provided. The bulletin concludes with a listing of six organizations that can provide further information on the topic. Brief summaries describe the organizations' focus and activities. (YLB)

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★RESOURCE★ BULLETIN

July 1996

Engaging Organized Labor in School-to-Work Systems

Organized labor has long been a supporter of work-based training programs for youth. The school-to-work model, with its emphasis on integrating the academic and work-based learning experiences of young people, depends in large part on its ability to engage front-line workers as equal partners in a system. To support this, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 requires that school-to-work initiatives engage representatives of organized labor in the development, implementation, and governance of a school-to-work system. Therefore, every state, regional, and local school-to-work partnership should make a specific effort to involve union representatives in system design and implementation.

What does organized labor bring to the school-to-work table?

- Labor unions, especially in the skilled trades and manufacturing, have a long history of collaborating with employers on the development of exemplary apprenticeship programs that link classroom-based learning with on-the-job training. Their decades of experience in developing classroom-workplace linkages, applied curriculum, and skill standards can be invaluable to school-to-work system building efforts.

- Labor unions represent millions of front-line workers in both the public and private sectors. Therefore, a linkage with organized labor is an ideal mechanism for building solid, grassroots, front-line worker support for the shadowing, mentoring, and work-based learning that are essential building blocks of a school-to-work system.

- Labor unions have direct links to employers from a wide variety of occupational areas and play key roles in facilitating employer involvement in school-to-work efforts.

- Labor unions have dealt substantially with issues such as work, technology, and workplace change and can bring a "real-life" perspective on these issues to both teachers and students.

- Labor unions are at the forefront of the effort to ensure safe and healthful workplaces for all workers and can offer "real-world" learning for students in this area, both in the classroom and at the worksite.

- Labor unions understand workplace dynamics, worker rights, and labor history and can be of substantial assistance--in both planning and delivery--in achieving a comprehensive curriculum

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which adequately and meaningfully conveys "all aspects of an industry."

Failure to involve organized labor and front-line workers represents a missed opportunity to provide the most comprehensive and effective services to young people. This bulletin expands on the above points and presents strategies through which organized labor can be actively engaged in the development of school-to-work systems. At the end of the bulletin is a listing of resources that can provide additional information on involving organized labor in school-to-work initiatives.

Strategies

Building Local Partnerships. Labor unions are most effective in a school-to-work system when viewed as catalysts for program development and not as special interests that must be recognized. As a result, it is critical that organized labor be involved in a school-to-work initiative from the very beginning. Often, employers and schools collaborate to develop a school-to-work structure, recruiting labor unions to sign on only after a framework has been developed. Labor unions, however, play crucial roles in the initial planning and development stages of a program through their strong working relationships with employers and experience in working with employers to develop on-the-job training programs. These existing partnerships and experiences can assist in recruiting employers for participation. Some schools, for example, have reached out to unions first, allowing labor to make the first contact in recruiting employers for participation in a school-to-work system.

Identifying Growing Occupations. Organized labor can assist in identifying which occupations are most appropriate to target in a school-to-work system. Unions are actively involved in analyzing occupational and employer trends and, as a result, are well equipped to identify which occupations are likely to experience the most growth and hold the most promise for the future. This will ensure that young people are trained for careers in vital and growing occupations, not for low-skill, low-wage jobs.

Enhancing the Quality of Work-Based Learning. The quality of a work-based learning experience depends largely upon the quality of a workplace itself. High quality workplaces are characterized by open environments, in which all employees--including front-line workers--have a say in developing their own roles and responsibilities. The same holds true for a school-to-work system. Because front-line workers best understand which tasks provide the most rewarding learning experiences, they can assist in identifying appropriate roles and responsibilities for student learners in the workplace. This strategy also fosters stronger relationships between labor and management, as they learn to collaborate in program development. Labor organizations can also assist school-to-work partnerships in assessing whether a work placement will truly provide students with a learning-rich environment. In addition, labor representatives can help avoid situations where students might simply be viewed as cheap labor.

Linking Academic to Occupational Learning. Organized labor offers a rich source of knowledge as to what academic skills are most needed for success at work. Collaborative partnerships between teachers and workers can call upon this knowledge to develop curricula that includes real-world applications and linkages to classroom instruction. This not only acquaints teachers and workers with each other, but also helps students identify connections between school and work.

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It is important that the link be made between the school and the workplace to ensure quality learning experiences for students. Teachers, most of whom are members of a union, should be brought into the non-school workplace. This will afford them the opportunity to acquire real-world examples for teaching academic content in their classrooms, to stay current with the skill requirements of these workplaces, and to make connections with those who can contribute to ongoing dialogue for continuous changes in curriculum and instruction.

In addition, school-to-work requires that youth examine "all aspects of an industry." Representatives of labor unions can work directly with students in the classroom to focus on the role of labor in industry. For example, union representatives can visit classrooms to discuss the contribution of labor unions in improving the quality of work, promoting safe and healthy workplaces, ensuring fair treatment, and obtaining good pay and benefits. This can help young people better understand the broader system in which their work-based learning experience exists, equipping them to become more active members of their work environments.

Developing Skill Standards and Credentialing Techniques. Successful school-to-work systems hold participants to high academic and occupational standards. Labor unions can play a large role in the development of the skill standards. For example, representatives of labor can serve on skill standards development boards or regional advisory councils--already the case at the national level--to provide other partners in a school-to-work system with the labor perspective on which academic skills are most relevant to a particular occupation and what levels of competency are required for success. In addition, labor representatives can collaborate with business management in identifying workplace standards to which student participants should be held. Once developed, these standards can be used to create student credentials or skill certifications.

Developing Assessment Mechanisms. The most successful school-to-work systems are those that continually reassess and restructure their programming to meet the rapidly changing demands of the workforce and the economy. These assessments can include an examination of workplace as well as academic progress. More specifically, they can examine how much student performance has improved at school and work, and if learning experiences are still relevant to economic and workforce demands. The experience of labor unions and their job training and apprenticeship programs can assist in developing assessment measures for programs that integrate classroom learning with on-the-job training.

Mentorship. Mentors help to achieve the school-to-work goal of providing *all* students with learning that connects school to work. Therefore, in shifting beyond "pilot projects" to the capacity-building necessary to serve many students, school-to-work systems will need to engage vast numbers of front-line workers for shadowing and mentoring. Labor unions can play a critical role in achieving that level of front-line worker recruitment. Once recruited, workplace mentors can provide guidance to youth learning how to behave at work, and can help students in identifying career paths and lifelong goals. Workplace "shadowing" is another important tool that helps both students and teachers witness first-hand the application of academic knowledge and the demands of the workplace in a real-world setting.

Occupational Health and Safety Standards. One of the most critical issues in school-to-work is that the workplace meet high health and safety standards. Often, school-to-work experiences provide young people with their first awareness of the potential dangers of working with machinery,

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equipment, or hazardous chemicals, as well as their first awareness of the importance of clean air and safety conditions at the worksite. Front-line workers, who face such safety challenges every day and who participate in workplace health and safety committees, are best equipped to take the lead on preparing youth to function safely at work and to understand their safety rights and responsibilities. Involving labor in this aspect of school-to-work further utilizes the knowledge of front-line workers, and makes the workplace safer for young people.

Effective Practices

The Job Skills Partnership Program (JSP), operated at six sites by the Southern California Edison Company (SCE), provides students with the opportunity to work directly with front-line workers in the utilities industry. JSP has involved the Utility Workers United of America, Local 246 (UWUA), and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 47 (IBEW), in its program, with both organizations participating in the selection and training of worksite mentors, student orientation programs, and evaluation and assessment of JSP. Central to the involvement of UWUA and IBEW has been their participation in JSP's mentorship program. In this program, students rotate to a new mentor every six weeks to expose them to all aspects of the power plant, including maintenance, operations, administration, warehousing, and technical work.

At the beginning of each rotation, students are paired with individual mentors, who work directly with youth to identify their individual responsibilities and goals. This provides students with both hands-on skills training and direct exposure to the demands of the workplace. In addition, JSP takes work-based learning beyond teaching the mechanical skills required to complete a job--such as using tools, repairing equipment, and identifying and diagraming systems--to help young people develop problem-solving and cognitive skills. This is done by engaging youth in "troubleshooting" aspects of work, in which they and their mentors work together to tackle problems encountered during the work day, such as defective machinery. Mentors also bring students to crew meetings, safety meetings, and union meetings to help them better understand the benefits and activities of organized labor. Once a rotation is completed, mentors and students again sit down to conduct a constructive, unbiased assessment of the student's performance and future educational and employment plans. The active partnership with UWUA and IBEW has provided JSP participants with a more well-rounded vision of work and its relationship to learning, leaving youth better prepared for careers in not only the utilities industry, but other occupations as well.

The District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund is a union-management organization composed of the National Union of Health Care Employees; affiliated with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO; and 60 major health care employers in the Philadelphia region. Persuaded by the huge number of members' children in the Philadelphia School District, the Fund and the hospitals joined together to found the Philadelphia Health Academy. The structure of the Academy is a partnership among the school district, health care employers of the region, and the Fund. The partnership has grown to a total of six health academies in the City of Philadelphia, and in May 1996 an additional partnership was formed with the Delaware County School District to establish a health academy in suburban Philadelphia.

The academies function as schools within schools with a core of students and faculty who remain together throughout high school. The program combines an academic curriculum infused with health care experiences provided by the health care partners, field trips, and work experience. The governing

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board is composed of the school superintendent and the major health care partners, including the Fund.

Representatives of the Fund have been actively involved in the work-based learning component of the academies. Students are placed in work experience settings during portions of the school day, with representatives of the Fund operating six half-day sessions for these students during the spring semester. Representatives of the Fund help students identify how their individual work experiences can be related to the broad spectrum of health and the employment opportunities available within this field. Health care reform is used as a device to demonstrate the factors affecting the health care industry, with representatives of the Fund focusing on the specific occupations to be explored, the training required for these occupations, and where quality training can be found. During this time, students are encouraged to develop both short- and long-term career objectives.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

Effective Practices

The Job Skills Partnership Program: Pat Ingles, Southern California Edison Company, 2244 Walnut Grove Avenue, Rosemead, CA 91770 ★ 818-302-0517.

Jack Gravener, Utility Workers United of America, Local 246, 10355 Los Alamitos Boulevard, Los Alamitos, CA 90720 ★ 310-594-8881.

The District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund: Jim Ryan, Director, 1319 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107 ★ 215-735-5555.

Organizations

The AFL-CIO Education Department tracks public policy and research related to education and training for the federation's affiliated unions and state and local AFL-CIOs. This includes school-to-work, vocational and adult education, apprenticeship and training, and higher education. 815 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 ★ 202-637-5000.

The AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute (HRDI) is the employment and training arm of the AFL-CIO, and works with labor, management, educational institutions, and community-based organizations to plan, design, and implement comprehensive work-based education and training programs. One of the foremost goals of HRDI is to help workplaces become more competitive by addressing the skill development needs of workers. HRDI's programmatic experience involves extensive work with networks of labor, business, and educational institutions. 815 16th Street, NW, Room 405, Washington, DC 20006 ★ 202-638-3912.

The AFL-CIO Central Labor Councils (CLC) coordinate all labor activities in a local community. CLCs are federations of all unions in a geographic area, and are currently located in 610 communities across the 50 states and Puerto Rico. CLC partnerships provide the most direct local links between organized labor, employers, educators, and communities. If you do not know how to contact your local CLC, please call your state AFL-CIO office.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) represents 875,000 members committed to the development of quality school-to-work programs. These are based on high academic standards with multiple, but equally rigorous, pathways. 555 New Jersey Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20001 ★ 202-393-6373 ★ http://www.aft.org/top.htm.

The National Education Association (NEA) is a membership organizations of K-12 public school teachers, school support personnel, higher education faculty, retired educators, and students in teacher preparation programs. At the local level, NEA affiliates are active in a wide variety of activities, from conducting professional workshops on a variety issues that affect faculty and school support staff to bargaining contracts for school district employees. NEA state affiliates regularly lobby legislators for the resources schools need, campaign for higher professional standards for the teaching profession, and file legal actions to protect academic freedom. At the national level, NEA's work includes coordinating innovative projects to restructure how learning takes place. 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3290 ★ 202-822-7749 ★ http://www.nea.org.

The National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) is dedicated to the development of a national system of voluntary skill standards designed to promote improved workforce performance and, as a result, American competitiveness. Twenty-two sites have been commissioned by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor to explore issues relating to the development of national voluntary skill standards. These sites are experienced in working with representatives of organized labor in creating workforce development and preparation systems. NSSB can provide contact information for these sites. 1441 L Street, NW, Suite 9000, Washington, DC 20005-3521 ★ 202-254-8628.

The following AFL-CIO state federations have school-to-work staff positions. The list is not exhaustive, as additional state federations and labor councils are in the process of securing school-to-work staff. For additional information on labor organizations that have school-to-work labor liaisons, please contact the AFL-CIO's Human Resource Development Institute (listed above).

Illinois State AFL-CIO, 82 South 2nd Street, Suite 200, Springfield, IL 62704 ★ 217-525-6678. Contacts: Daniel Cosgrove, Education and Research Director; Ronald Morehead, Training Coordinator.

Indiana State AFL-CIO, Labor Institute for Training, Inc., 1701 West 18th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202 ★ 317-632-9147. Contact: Tom Buccella, Program Coordinator.

New York State AFL-CIO, 100 South Swan Street, Albany, NY 12210-1939 ★ 518-436-8516. Contact: Robert L. Lieberman, New York State School-to-Work Coordinator.

Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, 906 S. Columbia Street, #330, Olympia, WA 98501 ★ 360-943-0608. Contact: Randy Loomans, Labor Liaison for School-to-Work.

For additional information, please contact:
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